

# DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 28 No. 1

January 15, 1960

Whole No. 328

## The Applause Column in Tip Top Weekly

by J. P. Guinon





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Although the Merriwell stories in Tip Top Weekly were its chief attraction, other features in Street & Smith's immensely popular little publication were also of interest. Not the least of these was the Applause Column, in which appeared each week several pages of letters from readers giving out with their opinions of the stories, the characters, the author and occasionally each other, their statements in some instances not being complimentary. Each letter published was followed by a comment from the editor, ranging from a brief "thank you" to replies of considerable length when such a response seemed appropriate.

For most of the twenty years of Tip Top's existence the Applause was tremendously popular and was read by the fans with as much interest as the stories themselves. It imparted a personal touch that seemed to unite the readers, publishers, author and characters into a sort of big happy family. It gave everyone a chance to get his name and opinions into print where several hundred thousand readers would view them, and all it cost to bid for the attention of this huge audience was two cents for a stamp to carry one's letter to Street & Smith in New York City.

Now, practically everyone who wanted to be thought fashionable and up to date wrote personal letters in those days. The ability to do so was considered a desirable and even necessary accomplishment. Penmanship and composition were emphasized in the schools. "Correspondence Clubs" flourished, and many members thereof developed a graceful Spencerian handwriting and the competence to express themselves with it in an interesting and intelligent manner. To a large extent writing, with its companion talent, reading, utilized the time then that today is taken up by radio, television, movies, auto trips, rock-and-roll and other activities that excite the imagination but do not add much, if anything, to one's stock of useful knowledge.

So the Applause Column did not lack for material. Tip Top had nearly half a million readers in its heyday, and thousands of letters from them reached the publishers every week, thirty or forty of which were eventually printed. Many were mere routine declarations of approval and admiration, but some attracted general attention with interesting views well stated, and others because the writers felt impelled to criticize certain favorite characters in the stories, or

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Published Monthly at

821 Vermont Street, Lawrence, Kansas

Edited by

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Lawrence, Kansas

Price \$2.00 per year

Assistant Editor

Ralph F. Cummings, Fisherville, Mass.

Asst. Ed. Photography—Charles Duprez, 228 Larch Lane, Smithtown, L.I., N.Y.

Ad Rates — 6c per word. \$1.00 per inch. quarter page \$2.25, half page \$3.00 and Full Page \$5.00. — 4 times for the price of three.

Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month in order to assure publication in the following month's issue.



to disagree more or less emphatically with some other writer's opinions, both of which usually resulted in a flood of correspondence from partisans on both sides of the controversy. Many letters were written in the stilted, verbose style affected by some in those days; others, by less gifted individuals, were evidently turned out at the cost of a great deal of painful mental and physical labor. With thousands of contributions to choose from, and with his occasionally pungent comment following each letter selected for publication, the editor could be depended on to come through with an interesting column for each issue.

Today these columns are even more interesting, as one browses through them, tries to visualize the writers as they were then, and wonders what life brought to each of them and how many are still around after more than fifty years. It's a safe bet that most of them are now long gone, but some remain, including a few of our present crop of Rounduppers. For instance, George French, who took the floor in the Applause Column of Tip Top No. 403; Aubrey Egerton, in 339 and 498. Samuel Olmhausen in New Tip Top 86 and 117; Alice Burke, (who is today a Roundupper under another name) in No. 430, and Gerald McIntosh in New Tip Top 119 and 132, are a few who come to mind.

In those days, alas! even as today, practically everyone believed himself to be a poet, and in nearly every Applause Column appeared manful and sometimes desperate attempts at verse. Most of these concoctions were, to be frank, pretty awful, inasmuch as the authors apparently knew nothing of such important aids to a rhymster as meter, feet, and other fundamentals of versification. Never did poetic license take such a beating as in the Applause Column! Usually the rhyming was as bad as the meter, such painful combinations as June and bloom, or second and reckon, being common. But, although none of these valiant versifiers ever appeared likely to give Tennyson or Byron any

competition, it is entirely possible that some of them survived to become the song writers of today, judging from the lyrics that accompany most modern melodies.

However, not all the verse submitted to the Column was a matter of concern to the Muses involved. Occasionally an effort was published that was really excellent, notably those sent in by A. P. Gallagher of New York. Usually signing himself "Archer" or "Once More," Gallagher had examples of his genuine ability as a writer of verse in Tip Top No. 332, 341, 379, 509 and many other issues. A typical composition was in No. 450. Here is part of it:

"Of all my treasured tomes, to me  
The dearest are, kind friends, I trow  
The Tip Top Quarterlies that we  
Have learned to love and cherish so.  
My love for them will ever grow;  
Its vigor time can never quell.  
For soul-uplifting, are, I know,  
The stories of Frank Merriwell."

Two more equally clever verses follow, and he concludes with this l'envoi:

"Prince, if to me wealth were not foe,  
In crushed levant, I vow, would dwell  
Beside my Lamb, my Keats, my Poe,  
The stories of Frank Merriwell."

Some contributors to Applause, in later life, became famous in various fields. Recalling a few, there comes to mind a letter from Milt Gross, the humorist, which appeared in No. 256. Clarence E. Mulford, whose "Hopalong Cassidy" stories brought him fortune and renown, wrote a hot defense of Bart Hodge in 304, and his photo appeared in 271 as an entrant in a Tip Top Athletic Contest, and again in 298 as winner of first prize therein. Thomas W. Bibb, the financier, had a letter in 394, and Carter Glass, Jr., in later years a political power from Virginia, in 665. A couple of pugilists who became top-notchers in the ring wrote in, Monte Cross in 692 and Stanley Ketchel in 718. As it was a popular custom then to sign letters for publication with initials only or pen names of some sort, it is probable there were many more let-



ters in Applause from embryo celebrities who did not sign their names and consequently can't be positively identified now. However, the examples given will suffice.

It seemed that something was always happening in Tip Top or Applause to upset the readers and trigger off huge volumes of mail to the editors. A case in point was the bitter controversy, that raged for years between Elsie and Inza admirers, over which gal would get the job of being Frank Merriwell's wife. Attacks on Bart Hodge, Brad Buckhart and some other characters by readers who claimed to dislike them, and the villainies of Chester Arlington following his first appearance in No. 338, were productive of barrages of letters that lamed the backs of certain New York postmen. Another notable arouser was the letter from Charles Ingram of Allentown, Pa., who, in No. 378, signing himself "I. M. Kicking," sent in some opinions to Applause that rocked fandom to its foundations and maybe even farther. Noting the reaction of the Tip Toppers to this particular letter, Ingram must have felt pretty good over his foresight in using a nom de plume instead of his real name. He had a coat of tar and feathers waiting for him in just about every State in the Union.

The Column, which began with No. 24, faded out 16 years later with No. 815, by which time the stories had lost much of their appeal and there was little left to applaud. Two years later, when a vigorous effort was made by the publishers to revive the foundering Tip Top Weekly, the Applause Column returned under the heading of "The Compass," and under that name, in 1916, it went down with the ship, so to speak.

The identity of all the editors who conducted the Applause Column during the many years in which it appeared, is not known, but one, at least, has been identified. He was St. George Rathborne, who handled the job for a long time with all the great finesse it required. Even after Patten quit as author, and Rathborne

had to turn out a number of the Tip Top stories himself, he still carried on with his Applause Column.

A department somewhat similar to Applause was the "Questions and Answers" Column, which was presided over by "Professor Fourmen." He received letters from and dispensed information, advice and instructions to readers who were interested in improving their physical condition, a fad made highly popular at that time by Bernarr McFadden's Physical Culture Magazine, and, to a considerable extent, by Tip Top Weekly itself. "Prof. Fourmen" had a large following among the Tip Toppers, who read his column each week as regularly as they did the other features. His real name, unfortunately, is unknown, but in the era in which he labored, his counsels were sound and valuable, and benefited thousands of those who took his advice about exercise, diet, smoking, drinking, etc.

But one of his recommendations, given to "E. W. S." a 13-year-old of St. Louis, Mo., in No. 463, has remained in my mind for more than half a century, as I'm still not sure if it was just something special for "E. W. S." alone, or if it was aimed at everyone. If the former, one could sympathize with "E. W. S." but console himself with the thought that one must accept what the Fates dish out, but if all and sundry were expected to comply, a long-established American custom was threatened.

For, in his suggestion to "E. W. S." the Prof urged a regular weekly change of underwear!

Now, the Prof didn't mention the seasons, so presumably he meant for this advice to be followed summer and winter. Of course, if an authority of the eminence of Prof. Fourmen insisted, one conceivably could concede a point and change underwear once a week in the summer, perhaps. But as all oldtimers know, it was the custom in those good old times, when fall winds brought chilly prophecies of frigid days to come, to sew up all the kids and most of the grown-ups in their red flannels for the winter.



It was a tedious job to do properly, and almost as hard to locate the right stitches and shuck a person out again in the spring. Surely the Prof. knew this! Could he have been really serious when he advised "E. W. S." to perform this chore every week? Did he expect all his followers to do it, even in winter?

I never found out!

## PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT

Expenses	
Publishing cost incl. postage	\$554.50
Income	
Subscriptions	\$280.00
Advertising	155.25
Sales, Round-up	11.55
Sales, Golden Days	4.00
Sales, Nickel Library	16.00
Contributions	1.50
Total Income	\$468.30
Net Loss	\$86.20

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231. Harold Poore, 5116 Jaysue St., Anderson, Ind. (New member)
232. Donald R. Hale, 910 North Park, Independence, Mo. (New member)
233. Antiquarian Bookman, Box 1100, Newark 1, N. J. (New member)
36. George Sahr, 7001 31st Ave., Kenosha, Wis. (New address)

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#251 May 26, 1882, #244 April 21, 1882, #290 January 12, 1883, #290 January 12, 1883, #323 July 6 1883, #349 December 7, 1883, #378 May 16, 1884, #391 August 15, 1884, #400 September 19, 1884, #404 October 3, 1884

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